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Marketing

Celebrities lend star quality to teen marketing

By Jayne O'Donnell and Erin Kutz
USA TODAY

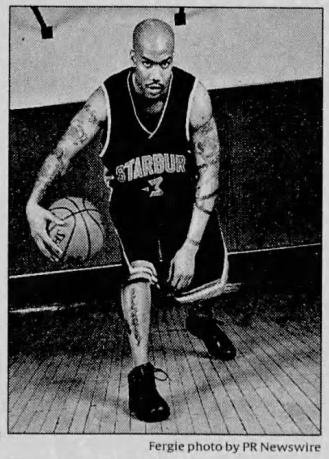
Musical artist Fergie is pitching Mac cosmetics' Viva Glam line. Actress Amanda Bynes has her own apparel line at Steve & Barry's. And singer Avril Lavigne's namesake clothing will be at Kohl's in July.

Celebrities, retailers say, bring a cachet to products that advertising can't touch. And when you're trying to reach the teen market, stars shine even brighter.

Steve & Barry's uses seven celebrity designers, and half the stores' merchandise has a star attached to it. Chief partnership officer Howie Schacter says the chain uses only celebrities who share the company's philosophy of offering high-quality fashion that's affordable. (All the retailer's merchandise is now $8.98 or less.) Schacter says stars also offer a way to generate buzz, especially with teen shoppers, without the stores having to spend a fortune on advertising.

"We're not a traditional advertiser, so whatever product we come up with, we need to find a way to make it very newsworthy," he says.

Having New York Knicks point guard Stephon Marbury play NBA games wearing the $8.98 sneakers he designed for Steve & Barry's helps gain credibility — and publicity.



Fergie photo by PR Newswire

Star cachet: NBA star Stephon Marbury designs for Steve & Barry's. At left, Fergie pitches Mac cosmetics.

Heidi Montag, star of the TV show *The Hills*, feels similarly about the Heidiwood clothes being launched this week at Anchor Blue stores. Nothing costs more than $60. "I wanted everyone who likes fashion and clothes to be able to afford it," she said.

Other celebrity pitches:

▸ **Fergie.** Mac had already signed the Black Eyed Peas lead singer to be the Viva Glam spokeswoman when a survey by market research firm TRU announced she's the top musical artist for "familiarity and likability" among teens.

Viva Glam is also popular with teens because 100% of the profits go to the Mac AIDS Fund, says John Demsey, group president for Estée Lauder, which owns Mac. "She's a 32-year-old music star who is loved by 16-year-olds," he says. "Pop culture and teen culture converge at some point."

▸ **Bynes.** The star of the movie *Hairspray*, among others, says she's closely involved in the design of the clothes in her Steve & Barry's Dear line. Bynes, 22, says she's helped design clothes "I would like to wear on a day-to-day basis." She's glad, she says, that she can give high school and college-age girls a chance to wear her jackets but pay less than $20. "When I was growing up, I always wanted the coolest jeans and the 'in shirt.' But my parents would always say to me, 'We're not going to buy the most expensive thing, because you're growing.' "

▸ **The Sprouses.** Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen's Dualstar Entertainment Group licenses the clothing line of 15-year-old twins Dylan and Cole Sprouse, stars of the Disney Channel's *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody*. It's sold at www.shopsprousebros.com.

"These are clothes they wear," says Tori Matt, Dualstar's marketing director. "They've been known to sit down with a Sharpie and actually doodle a graphic for a T-shirt."

Many teens already mirror their favorite celebrities in their style of dress, so celebrity designers and endorsers help teens narrow their searches to achieve the looks, says Paige Newman of consumer trend and behavior research firm Zandl Group.

"It gives an easily discernible style to the merchandise," she says.

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